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**Indigenous Healing and Treatment Practices among the Nyishis of Kurung
Kumey and Kra Daadi Districts in Arunachal Pradesh**

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Abstract

The use of plants and animal as a source of medicine is as old as humanity. Traditional medicine is widely used by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as well as North East India and India as a whole. The Nyishi tribe is an indigenous group of people living in some districts of Arunachal Pradesh. For this study, Kurung Kumey and Kra Daadi districts have been taken as the focus areas of study. The paper gives a brief overview of the indigenous knowledge system of health and healthcare, people's understanding of health and diseases and how the people care and heal diseases & illness and drive away illness and sickness by traditional religious ritual and performances.

Keywords : Traditional Health, Medicine, Disease, Beliefs, Rituals and Nyishis

Introduction

In Arunachal Pradesh, the tribal groups form a major part of the population. Their population constitutes 64.63% of total population usually living in the hilly areas. The problems of health among the tribal population of Arunachal Pradesh poses a serious challenge to their overall development. Lack of proper health care and ailments, irrational belief system are some factors said to be aggravating the health and nutritional problems of these people which needs special attention. Nevertheless, every culture irrespective of its simplicity and complexity has its own beliefs and practices concerning diseases. Similarly, the tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh have their own concept of health within social and cultural moorings, purely governed on the basis of local conditions and ethos.

Most of the tribal people use plants as a source of medicine in their own medical lore. The Nyishi tribe has also been practicing the use of medicinal plants available

locally for curing some common illness. Utilization of this traditional knowledge of medicinal plants is not only useful for conservation of cultural traditions and biodiversity but also for community healthcare and drug development. Therefore, documentation of this traditional knowledge is inevitable to throw light into the field of herbal research and to improve socio-economic development of the people. In this study, an attempt has been made to find out the beliefs and practices related to health care system among the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh with special reference to the Kurung Kumey and Kra Daadi districts.

The People and the location

The present study was carried out among the Nyishi tribe of eight circles as namely: Parsi Parlo, Damin, Tali, Nyapin, Sangram, Yangte, Palin and Chambang and different 24 villages; namely, Parsi Parlo, Patu, Sera-I, Cheya, Lubupa, Huri, Tali, Loha, Langha, Nyapin, Yuba, Langte Loth, Sangram, Langhre Langro, Biasi, Anya Koyer, Nyoying, Mire-I, Dui, Bangte-Bangchi, Langdang, Chambang and Rongte-Rite. As reported in the Assam Census Report of 2011, “the total populations of Nyishi of two districts as Kurung Kumey and Kra Daadi are 92,764 with 98.60% and total literacy rate are 36,606.6 (48.80%)”. The total populations of whole Nyishis are 3.5 lakhs scattered in six districts of Arunachal Pradesh. But the divisions and scattered is not social differences, and there is no disharmony and disunity on the basis of traditional culturally, socio-cultural, socio-economic and political aspects are same. They practices tribal polygamy, endogamy and clan exogamy systems of marriage. In Arunachal Pradesh, they are mainly living in seven districts; namely, viz., Papum Pare, part of Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kumey, East Kameng, parts of Upper Subansiri, West Siang, the recently created district Kra Dadi and are also found in the Sonitpur and North Lakhimpur districts of the neighbouring state of Assam.

Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To understand the conception of health, disease, etiology and treatment in the Nyishi tribe.
2. To know the health status of the Nyishi tribe.
3. To identify the indigenous medicines used by the Nyishi tribe.
4. To understand the magico-religious beliefs of Nyishi tribe. etc

Methodology

The present paper is based on the data collected on traditional health practice as well as use of indigenous medicine and religious practices among the Nyishis of Kurung

Kumey and Kra Daadi districts. The study was conducted in eight circles and twenty four villages of Kurung Kumey and Kra Daadi districts. These circles and villages are entirely inhabited by the Nyishis and Purioks (Solung) people. The data were collected mainly from the village medicinemen, priest, religious leaders and also from some elderly persons of the villages who have good knowledge about indigenous medicine through in-depth interview, observation and case study method.

Concept and Health Status of Nyishi Tribe

The concept of good health is universal throughout the world among the all the communities tribal and non-tribal. People consciously or unconsciously realized that health is a function, not only of medical cure, but also of the overall integrated development of society viz; cultural, economic, education, social and political. Each of these aspects has a deep influence on health, which in turn influences all these aspect. Hence, it is not possible to raise the health status and quality of life of people unless such efforts to bring about the overall transforming of a society (Bora and Duarah, 1999).

The concept of health is known through personal health condition of an individual by seeing the physical activeness and intake of food. There is no particular terms for the health in the Nyishi dialect.

Health and Hygiene of Nyishi Tribe

The Nyishi tribe maintained health and hygiene since time immemorial. According to the mythology, in the beginning, spirit and human were living together harmoniously. With the times, Abo-Tani started ruling all other things which disturbed the harmonious relationship. They believe that because of Abotani foolishness, the spirit got angry and started inflicting disease to Tani society. There are also many other factors combine together to affect the health condition of the Nyishi such as housing structure, drinking water, hygiene practice, food habits and dress or clothing pattern.

Method of Identification of Diseases

The Nyishi method of identification of disease and illness are very simple in the first site. The hot and cold concept is very popular among the Nyishi, by touching the forehead of a patient then, they identifying hot and cold conditions of the patient. After the identification of diseases, specific herbal medicines are given to cure the disease. The Nyishi also identifies diseases from the diet habit of a person. For example; if a person eats more chilly and ginger are caused by the “Eyok Wiyu”. If the patient is not cured from herbal medicine than they go for spiritual or faith healing, where priest is the supreme authority to identify the causing spirit and ghost (as noted by Villagers/ Priest).

The priest is considered as very important person in the Nyishi society. The priest identifies the diseases and sickness of a person and who are the responsible for the disease and illness. First of all that priest asked the patient or close relative, whether the patient is cold or hot and what kind of food he likes to eat and which body part is suffering with pain. After that, the priest has to identify the spirit who caused sickness to that patient. Followings are the methods by which priest used to identify the spirit (Wiyu).

Seeing omen is an integral part of the Nyishi life. The priest or any other person having the knowledge in this regard can see the omen. The normal practice is that along with the person who see omen, two to three persons remain present to confirm the omen (Bora, 2003). Some usual methods of identifying disease are discussed below:

1. Zerbik Tabnam or Yuma Kanam

This is first methods to identify the causing spirits by the Nyubu. In this, the knife or stone and hats of the person are used. The priest use one of this mentioned items, which he holds at hand or hang at fire rusting place “Rapki” and starts chanting. In this chanting that priest asked the spirit, who causes sickness to the patient and if a person is causing by the particular spirit then the changing object is swing itself while on chanting. After that the priest asks the spirit not to harm the soul of the patient and to take animal soul in place of human soul.

2. Pepe Cheenam

This is another way of identification of diseases and sickness which is caused by the spirit. The priest holds the egg and chants and asks the causing spirit to show the symbols on the egg. After chanting, the egg is boiled on small pot and then egg shell is cleared and egg is cut into two equal halves with the help of human hair, lastly the egg is opened for examination to identify the spirits.

3. Pachung or Roowo Kognam:

In this also that priest hold the small chicken and chant, and then cut from the neck and then take out the liver for examination. Priest can chant for the egg in once time, holding one each in hand but in chicken case one chicken is chant in a time. If the causing spirit is not identified then same process is also continue up to next days and priest have to sleep in the patient’s house.

Result and Discussion

Traditional medicine could be defined in a number of ways taking into account the concepts and practices. The system is so comprehensive that it is very difficult to put

the form in a particular slot of medical science of traditional medicines broadly. They are (i) small and indigenous traditional medicines, which include mostly folk system, based on socio-cultural aspect as well as magico-religious aspects of smaller groups of people and (ii) the second system is called the great traditional medicine or system based on the concept of ayurvedic, unani, sidh, nature cure and yoga medical system. This form of medicine takes into consideration homoeopathy, as well, in the Indian context. On the other hand, as Bhasin (2007) mentioned traditional medicine includes all kinds of folk medicine, unconventional medicine and indeed any kind of therapeutic method that had been handed down by the tradition of a community or ethnic group. It is customary to find all kinds of practices grouped under the common heading 'traditional medicine' - mainly because they do not emanate from the biomedical paradigm.

In case of health and treatment in the study area, traditional medicine or ethno-medicine is considered as an important aspect and this is the major factor, which is discouraging the villagers from going to the hospital. They believe that their traditional system of medicine can cure them from all illness. Moreover, it is locally available and economical. They also believe that there is no effective medicine for certain categories of diseases like smallpox, chickenpox, etc. which are supposed to be originating from supernatural causes. Generally, ethno-medicine denotes the medical beliefs and practices found in primitive and folk societies, which has two main components, i.e. herbal and magico-religious therapy.

Herbal Medicinal Practices

The Nyishis of Kurung Kumey and Kra Daadi districts have their own indigenous methods of treating different kinds of diseases. For treating diseases various type of locally available herbs and leaves of wild plants are used by them as medicine. Herbal specialists of the village, who have considerable knowledge about the herbs and its medicinal use, prepare these medicines. Of course, it has also been observed that many elderly persons known and prepared some herbal medicines for some common diseases such as fever, dysentery, jaundice, liver disease, stomach trouble, headache, body ache, piles, etc. However, it is observed in the study that several herbs or various parts of several plants have been used for treating different kinds of ailments. In the following, an attempt has been made to enlist some diseases and their corresponding herbs treatment in the Nyishi society.

1. Fever

Sebibesar (White Monkey) bile is take out and keep at rusting place near fire site and dried it comfortably. Whenever person sick as if fever and malaria then dried bile

must be mixed with accurate amount and drink it fully then the patient to get and lead to preventive measures for diseases like fever and malaria would be relief from.

2. Dysentery

Tachi (Crab) whole body has to burn on the fire and eats to cure the diseases like Dysentery and Loose motion with other ailment of stomach problem. There is also Lime (citrus auran tifolia) preserved in salt for 20-30 days is given once or twice in a day. Bitter Root or leaves of items is also useful. Young leaves of bitter items for vegetables are also good for dysentery.

3. Jaundice

Kardoyi (Star fruit) are used for the treatment of jaundice. Boiled green leafy Vegetables are also used for jaundice. The early morning sunlight bath is also used for this disease. A glass of sugar cane (saccharum officiarum) juice twice daily is prescribed for this purpose.

4. Liver Disease

Taking raw or ripe papaya (carica papaya) daily can cure liver. Boiled green leafy vegetable also cure such same diseases.

5. Headache/ Headache / digestive problem

Sebin (Goat)'s horn/head/oil/fat of goat having bad smell are boiled and soup has to take to cure such diseases like headache and malaria. There is also Sis (Porcupin's testicle) is burnt or boiled and used for curing the malaria. The medicine is prepared by pounding the seeds of Bon tulsi (ocimum canum) to get relief from headache.

6. Toothache

Bitter Pointed plants flower/ fruits are applied on gum. They also use the paste prepare from the roots of bitter items to reduce toothache.

7. Piles

Ripe fruit or orange of wood apple (aegle marmelos) is given to patient. The whole plant of Lata kapalphuta (cardiospermum halicacabum) is made paste with water and use in piles. Take boiled vegetables daily in the diet. They also use bitter leaves juice Lajukilata (mimosa pudica) with milk as a good remedy for piles. Avoid the spices and leave red meat in the diet of food.

8. Pneumonia

Tongwngola (Honey Bee Juice) is useful for curing such diseases. With quality masses master oil mixed lotion masses on the body of sickness.

9. Cold And Cough

Leaf juice of Tarua kadam (*acacia farnesiana*) mixed with sugar is given once in a day for a week in cough. The flowers of Akon (*calotropis gigantean*) are also considered as digestive remedy for cough and cold. Tongwngola (Honey Bee Juice) is useful for curing such diseases. Nyui pee (Fish bile), directly consumed on fresh raw to cure the cough.

10. Gastric Trouble/ Acidity

Pata puyu wohu ala (Hornbill fat/oil) is use as medicine to cure the gastric itching. Rhizome juice of turmeric (*curcuma longa*) mixed with sugar is given once daily in empty stomach early morning for a forth night in acidity.

11. Tonsillitis

Juice is prepared by mixing one Amara seed (*sponolias mangifera*), one Silikha seed (*mysoballum*) and a piece of Turmeric (*purcuma domestica*) which is to be gargled for a week regularly.

12. Diarrhoea

Tachi (Crab) whole body has to burn on the fire and eat to cure the diseases like Dysentery and Loose motion with other ailment of stomach problem .The seed of Gonga moola (*capsella larsa pastoris*) is used as astringent in diarrhoea. Bark of long pepper (pipoli tree) mixed with misiri water is also used to cure this disease. Sometimes they also use a kind of juice prepared with dry gooseberry (*emblica officinalis*) powder and black salt mixed with cold water for this disease. Tea, sugar, salt and ginger mixed with hot water drink thrice in a day, which prevent from diarrhea.

13. Injuries

The paste prepared with the leaves of one type of grass (*pasuu wehe*), skin rubbing out from fresh bamboo to stop the injuries bleeding or roots of Gandhuaban (*ageratum conyzoides*) is used.

14. Stomach Trouble

Pata puyu wohu ala (Hornbill fat/ oil) is use as medicine to cure the stomach itching. Tachi (Crab) whole body has to burn on the fire and eats to cure the diseases

like Dysentery, stomach and loose motion with other ailment of stomach problem. Juice prepared with the leaves of Matikanduri (*alternanthera sessilis*) is also used. The plant called Bormanimumi (*centella asiatica*) is also used. They also use Sarumanimumi (*hydrocotyle rotundifolia*) as a medicine for stomach trouble. The plant called Durunban (*leucus aspera*) is also said to be good for this. The juice of Saru tengesi (*oxalis corniculata*) is also used to get relief from stomach problem. Leaves of Bhebelilata (*paederia fotida* linn) are also said to be good for this.

15. Kidney Trouble

Drinking plenty of fresh and clean water at early morning daily to cure such diseases. The juice prepared with the seeds of Bonhariah (*nasturtium indicum*) is used for this. The plant of Bhebelilata (*paederia fotida*) is very good for kidney trouble.

16. Urinary Trouble/ Disorder

Juice prepared with the leaves of Dupartenga (*bryophyllum pinnatum*) is used for quick healing of urinary trouble. Leave juice of Pani kolmou (*ipomea aquatica*) is also used for this. Juice prepared with the whole plant of Bonjaluk (*oldenlindia corymbosa*) is use for urinary trouble of children. Juice prepared with the roots or leaves of Agora (*xanthium strumarium*) is also used for urinary trouble. Drinking plenty of fresh and clean water at early morning daily to cure such diseases.

17. Malaria

Sebibesar (White Monkey's Bile) is take out and keep at rusting place near fire site and dried it comfortably. Whenever person get sick as if malaria then dried bile must be mixed with accurate amount and drink it fully. Juice prepared with the roots or leaves of Agora (*xanthium strumarium*) is used for curing malaria fever. Leaves of Dhopat tita (*clerododron infortunatum*) can be used against malaria fever. Sebin (Goat's horn/head/oil/fat) of goat having bad smell are boiled and soup has to take to cure such diseases like malaria. There is also Sis (Porcupin's testicle) is burnt or boiled and used for curing the malaria. The medicine is prepared by pounding the seeds of Bon tulsi (*ocimum canum*) to get relief from malaria.

18. Skin Disease

Paste prepared with the leaves of Medelwa (*cassia occidentalis*) is used as a remedy for skin disease such as itches, ringworm. The juice prepared with the whole plant of Bormanimumi (*centella asiatica*) or Sarumanimumi (*hydrocotyle rotundifolia*) may take with milk for skin disease.

In the study it is observed that the Nyishis rely heavily on herbal medicine to cure many disease and illness. Among these medicines, some are prepared in household and some are specially prescribed by herbalist or medicine men available in the village or in the nearby villages. It is also observed that these medicines are not restricted to this tribe only. Studies conducted by Bodding (1925), Redcliffe Brown (1948), Sukla (1959), Das (1981) and Mathur (1982) also show that similar methods are being used by many tribal and non-tribal people all over the India.

Magico-Religious Practices

As observed by researcher, magico-religious practice is an important aspect of ethno-medicine or folk medicine. Besides using herbal medicines, the Nyishis try to cure some of the diseases through magico-religious beliefs and practices. They offer prayers or chantings and sacrifices to appease the supernatural beings, which may be responsible for the disease. As believe by the villagers, there are four major causes of illness; namely, (i) anger of god, (ii) anger of ancestral spirits, (iii) breach of taboo and (iv) possession of evil spirits. In their society pox, hysteria, snake-bite, insomnia, convulsion, emaciation of children, mental disease and deformity of limb, congenital malformation, blindness, impotency, barrenness and prolonged illness are some of the conditions supposed to by supernaturally caused. Wrath of deities, influence of evil spirits and evil eye, magic of human being, sin committed and breach of taboo, etc. are believed to be the cause by supernatural being. Such diseases are treated through magico-religious therapy which varies with the type of cause identified. It mainly consists of either the propitiation of respective deities or driving away the supernatural bodies. Both magico-religious as well as herbal therapies are sometimes found necessary by the Nyshis to cure certain diseases like smallpox and snakebite.

The Nyshis believe that a cordial relationship with the deities and ancestral spirits will ensure good health for the members of their community. So, the villagers, particularly the villagers of Kurung Kumey and Kra Daadi district, perform various ceremonies every year during the annual festival to renovate their relationship with the supernatural forces and thus ensure their protection. They also believe that if the deities and ancestral spirits are not satisfied, then they will get angry and inflict diseases and other calamities upon the villagers.

Some of the main magico-religious practices performed by the Nyishis are as follows: It is believed in the Nyishis society that evil spirits are a group of supernatural entities which are always malevolent. They do a lot of harm to the people even without any provocation. Young children and pregnant women are believed to be more vulner-

able to their attack. They may bring diseases to little children and may drink blood of a foetus leading to successive abortions. The Nyshis believe that the universe was created by a supreme heavenly power defined as 'Bute-abu (The Father) and 'changtum ane' (The Mother) and consider themselves as the progenies of the Sun and the Moon. These deities are held to be omnipotent, omnipresent and always benevolent to mankind. Therefore, on every occasion of social and religious function, the Nyishis offer prayer first for these deities (Doley, 1998).

Besides this, the Nyishis also observe some other religious activities related to health such as Sarag Puja, Urom Posum, Rati Khowa Sampradan etc. in the study area. They observe Longte-yullo in the month of (April) at an interval of five years. Here also, the family offers oblations to the Sun and the Moon for the welfare of the family. During these days of prayer family members observed 'eiirenam' (taboo) for five days, i.e., during these periods the members of the family never go to other villages and never accept anything from their neighbours. Annual worshipping of the ancestral spirit (yajyale) is common feature of the religion of the Nyishis. These ancestral spirits belong to both the genders. If the ancestral spirit is worshipped regularly, he brings health and happiness to the family. Beside this, many more religious beliefs and practices have come into being among the villagers. Now a day, they have also been worshipping which are absolutely not traditional to the Nyishis. The terms designating these rituals are also not of those of the Nyishis but were borrowed from non-Nyishi communities.

Conclusion

Traditional beliefs and religious practices occupy significant position in health care practices in Nyishi society. Because, like any other tribal community, the Nyishis also believe that evil spirits are responsible for various diseases. They have performed various religious rituals, which are traditionally prevalent in their society, to get rid of different diseases. But, with the development of education and their awareness towards the importance of modern health care and also with the advent of modern health care facilities, people are becoming more interested in taking modern medicine instead of traditional herbal medicine.

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